

Marching Under the Green Flag

A Commentary
By Nicholas von Hoffman

The abiding concern of people in the higher circles of politics and journalism here is that they may fall out of touch with America. It's a settled conviction that this city is the last place to find out what's going on.

But now, in the middle of this peculiar non-campaign, a lot of people are wondering if America may not be out of touch with Washington. Don't people know what's going on here or don't they care?

In terms of dollars this is the most publicly corrupt administration since Grant's second term. Both in size and boldness it dwarfs the petty scandals of the Harding administration. And still there is no cry, not even a murmur, about "the mess in Washington," as it used to be called when people got scandalized and angry at the graft.

Are people too cynical to react? Do they think that all politicians are crooks, so forget it? Don't they know, or don't they appreciate the gargantuan amounts of money being diverted from the Treasury? Or, perhaps,

they have been led into thinking that the government "waste and inefficiency" they've been hearing about for years is accidental and inevitable.

It's neither. Rather it is deliberate policy, whereby some few people get rich by taking money that doesn't belong to them. How this is done is thoroughly explained and documented by A. Ernest Fitzgerald in a new book called "The High Priests of Waste" (W.W. Norton, Inc., N.Y., \$8.95). Fitzgerald was the civilian Air Force official who was fired by Melvin Laird when he told Congress about the "Great Plane Robbery," as he calls the C-5A, the huge military transport plane whose wings and motors fall off.

Fitzgerald estimates that \$1 billion was "stolen" in the process of developing and manufacturing this worthless aircraft. And that is the big point about the galloping corruption in Washington. It's no longer marginal. As men like Fitzgerald point out, the theft is so gigantic it is a major inflationary force in our economy. Not only that, but it is imperiling our national defense. Missiles that poop out, tanks that don't fire, helicopters that can't

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whirl properly, destroyers that are only fit for destroying themselves . . . we're doing what Nixon said he was against—we are unilaterally disarming, not through policy, but through greed.

Many people have just had to assume for their sanity's sake that all of this comes about through the corruption and stupidity of middle-level bureaucracy; but Fitzgerald shows that, to the contrary, the highest officials authorize overpaying corporations for work when it is finally crats for Nixon committees as everybody joined forces made. They know they are sending our own people to their deaths in substandard equipment, and that's why they fire, demote, silence and isolate the men who have had the guts and love of country to complain.

Have any of the men in government or industry responsible for the C-5A, the F-111, the Cheyenne helicopter, the DE-1052 destroyer or the rest of the useless multi-billion dollar junk been put in jail? No, they've been promoted or their companies have been given loans and new contracts.

Now you can see why a man like John Connally, who was so deeply involved in the Lockheed affair, is panicked at the thought of McGovern's election. Now

you can also see why a Melvin Laird calls McGovern's proposed cut in military expenditures the white flag of surrender. So it will look to one who marches under the green flag of corruption. Under a McGovern budget, what would be left for their buddies to steal?

Nor does the corruption stop at the water's edge. Another book explains how billions of dollars worth of American equipment, food and supplies are stolen in Vietnam. ("The Greedy War" by James Hamilton-Paterson, David McKay Company, Inc., N.Y. \$5.95.) Here we learn from the testimony of an American security man that every day in Phom Penh there is enough stolen American war material to equip a division. That must explain why the North Vietnamese hover around the Cambodian capital without trying to capture it. It's their supply base.

Both at home and abroad the pattern is the same. The Nixon administration came into a degenerately corrupt situation left by the Johnson people and built on it. No rascals were thrown out; they just formed Democrats for Nixon committees as everybody joined forces for the great looting and grew more bodacious. That's what's going on in Washington, and the people in the 50 states had better wise up to it or get ready to pay like they've never paid before.

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